



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

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FOREST SERVICE EMPLOYEE INDICTED FOR SETTING ILLEGAL WILDFIRES

PHOENIX-- A federal grand jury in Phoenix returned a four count indictment against Van Bateman, 55, of Flagstaff, Arizona, for violations of setting timber afire and arson on public lands.

Paul Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona, said, "It is particularly troubling when a public servant charged with protecting our forests is accused of abusing that trust by trying to destroy these national treasures."

The indictment alleges that Bateman set two wildfires on the Coconino National Forest. The first fire was the Mother Fire on May 8, 2004 and the second was the Boondock Fire on June 23, 2004. Bateman will be summoned to U.S. District Court to respond to the charges.

A conviction for setting timber afire carries a maximum penalty of five year(s), a \$250,000 fine or both. A conviction for arson on public lands carries a maximum penalty of twenty year(s), a \$250,000 fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, a district court judge will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

An indictment is simply the method by which a person is charged with criminal activity and raises no inference of guilt. An individual is presumed innocent until competent evidence is presented to a jury that establishes guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture Office of the Inspector General with assistance from Forest Service, Law Enforcement and Investigations. The prosecution is being handled by Kimberly M. Hare, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Ariz.

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